At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one game of many which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about VALORANT

AGE RATING PEGI 16

Valorant is one of the hottest first-person shooters on the market. Developed by Riot Games (makers of the hugely popular League of Legends) its gameplay is similar to titles like Overwatch and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive. Players choose a character and face off in teams of five against five opponents. Currently available only on PC through the Riot Games site, Valorant requires quick reflexes and dedication to progress. However, between dealing with other players, navigating the online store and avoiding possible addiction, there's plenty for parents and carers to consider before allowing children to play.

Violence & weapons

The violence in Valorant isn't gory, but players nevertheless use weapons like guns, knives and explosives to kill opponents and win a round. The selection of guns that can be bought and used ranges from fairly authentic looking to brightly coloured and cartoonish. The game's PEGI 16 rating should give parents and carers a useful indication of the intensity and realism of the combat.

In-game purchases

Valorant is free to download, only requiring an account on the Riot Games site. There is, however, a built-in digital store where real money can be exchanged for points: Valorant's in-game currency, which can be spent on weapons. Bundles of points cost between £4.99 and £99.99 – so if a card or PayPal account is linked to the game, children could easily rack up a large bill without realising it.

Risk of addiction

Games with a high skill ceiling – which require dedication and repetition to master – can quickly become addictive. Developers design games like Valorant to hook players and keep them coming back every day: this practice has seen online shooters cultivate vast user-bases over the last decade. Children are particularly susceptible to these tactics, which can unfortunately lead to obsession and eventual addiction.

Other Players

When millions of gamers from around the world discover a new title, it's sadly inevitable that some will harbour more sinister aims than winning games and having fun. In Valorant, teams audio chat via headsets – potentially exposing children to hazards such as name calling, harassment, inappropriate language and grooming. Players could also befriend each other online and then communicate outside the game via third-party apps like Discord or TeamSpeak.

Advice for Parents & Carers

Watch for signs of addiction

If you're concerned that a child is becoming addicted to a game, it's important to step in. Warning signs include irritability when not playing, hiding the extent of their game time, an inability to stop when asked and a lack of interest in other hobbies. Encourage a healthy mix of activities and perhaps agree a set amount of gaming time each day. Seek expert help if the symptoms worsen: it's better to have all safeguarding options on the table than let an addiction go too far.

Remove payment methods

The simplest way to prevent children accidentally (or deliberately) spending money on in-game purchases is to remove their ability to. If there is a bank card or PayPal account linked to any online games your child plays, the safest option is to disconnect them. Valorant supports prepaid gift cards, so you could consider purchasing these as an alternative which gives you more control.

Report problem players

If another player becomes a problem, your chid could mute them or report them to the game's developers. From the 'Career' tab on the main menu, they can view previous matches and should select the match featuring the abusive player. Highlight that player, and the option to report is in the dropdown menu. To mute other players in a game, go to the scoreboard and either mute or drag the volume slider of that player all the way down.

Try it yourself

Games like Valorant can seem overwhelming to start with, but they are designed to be easy to pick up and play – with a level of depth for those who want it. If you have another computer, you could download a second copy of the game and play alongside your child. It's an enjoyable way to bond over something they're already interested in, while also keeping an eye on them online.

Give eSports a chance

As a popular eSports title, Valorant has many professional players who compete in tournaments for sizeable prize pots. Watching a high-octane competitive game with professional shoutcasters (commentators) on platforms like YouTube and Twitch can be exciting. You could find out when live games are being played and watch them with your child, just like you might with football or rugby.

Meet Our Expert

Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for several years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the gaming editor of two the biggest gaming news sites in the world: UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Having started gaming at a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work – but, more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.

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SOURCES: https://guides.gamepressure.com/valorant/guide.asp?ID=54605#:~:text=There%20is%20no%20parental%20consent,client%20and%20play%20the%20game, https://gamequitters.com/valorant/, https://www.commonsensemedia.org/game-reviews/valorant/user-reviews/adult, https://www.commonsensemedia.org/game-reviews/valorant, https://www.taminggaming.com/game/Valorant, https://www.pcgamer.com/uk/how-to-report-players-valorant/#:~:text=On%20the%20main%20menu%2C%20select,Report%20once%20more%20to%20confirm.

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